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ABSTRACT

The Distar and Open Court reading programs illustrate contrasting definitions and emphases of reading instruction that are part of a larger concern--how children are expected to use their literacy skills. Both programs teach phonics, but they define phonics in different ways. Each relies on teacher-directed group instruction, but Open Court was designed for middle class children while Distar was designed for the disadvantaged; this distinction seems to be based on very different assumptions about the way their target children learn and the kinds of things that they need to know. On considering these differences and relating them to reading research, it may be concluded that the contention is not that one group is expected to be illiterate but that the groups of children may be literate in different ways. (Discussion following presentation of the paper is included.) (RL)

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Curriculum, Concepts of Literacy, and Social Class

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In this paper, I am going to describe aspects of two reading programs. My remarks will focus on two curriculum dimensions which interest me. The first has to do with how each program defines beginning reading. And the second has to do with the kinds of reading materials which the children are supposed to use. I will treat them both as aspects of a larger concern having to do with the kind of literacy that a program embodies: how are children expected to use their literacy? What value can it have for them?

I chose for analysis two programs which I think offer interesting contrasts along these dimensions: the Open Court Reading Program[1] and the Distar Reading Program.[2] They have in common the fact that both are popular and commercially successful. They also both claim to teach phonics although, as we shall see, they define phonics in very different ways. And they both rely primarily on teacher-directed group instruction. They differ, however, in several important ways. First of all, they were designed for two different populations: Open Court, primarily for middle class children and Distar (which is an offshoot of the successful Bereiter and Engelmann Head Start programs) was designed for the so-called disadvantaged. And second, as we shall see, the programs make very different assumptions about the way children learn and the kinds of things that they need to know.

The Orthographies and Their Mapping Rules

I will begin by describing some of the differences in the way in which phonics is defined in these programs and show how

this relates to the way in which each defines reading. Probably any program which purports to teach phonics is going to have to simplify English orthography to some extent -- either indirectly, by careful sequencing so that children encounter only so-called 'regular' words or by changing the orthography itself. For the brute fact is that the letters of English do not map onto the sounds in any linear, one-to-one phonemic fashion, but instead appear to be organized at the morphophonemic level and thus, serve to signal information about lexical structures rather than pronunciation per se (Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Venezky, 1972). And as a result, the mapping rules usually involve relationships between groups of letters and their sounds and are generally conditional in their application -- depending on position, lexical structure and so forth. (For example, the various pronunciations of t in hot, nation, another, anthill.)

Although both programs present a phonics curriculum and are more or less committed to traditional letter-by-letter sounding out or blending procedures, they confront the nonphonemic character of English orthography in rather different ways. Distar seeks to maintain a simplified set of linear, one-to-one sound-letter correspondence and as a result, is forced to modify the orthography in several important ways. Open Court adopts a more complex set of mapping rules (which include multiple sound-letter correspondences and context-dependent mappings) and as a result, is able to maintain the more adult-like orthography by using a controlled vocabulary of more or less 'regular' words.

I will consider some of the implications of these differ-

ences in a moment, but first, some examples will be useful.

Figure One shows the Distar alphabet. The program uses only these lower case letters throughout the first and most of the second year. As you can see, the typeface is somewhat unusual: there has obvicusly been an attempt to make certain confusable aspects of the letters more distinct. Thus, for example, the closed portion of the d is tilted while the closed portion of the b is not; the curved portion of the h is lower and smaller than the similar portion of the n; and so forth.

Other modifications relate more directly to establishing one-to-one sound-letter correspondences. Thus, for example, there are microns over the vowels to indicate long sounds and digraphs are physically joined to indicate a single pronunciation. Pronunciation is also signaled through letter size. Thus, for example, in Figure Two, the small k (in sick, lick) and the e (in hate) indicate that these letters are not to be "sounded." Taken together, these alterations work rather well to produce an orthography which can be sounded out in a consistent, left-to-right sequence. There are some exceptions. These are termed 'irregular' words and are handled in a way which, I think, epitomizes the way in which reading has been conceptualized in this program. For example, the teacher is told that:

> ...(it is important for) children to learn to discriminate between the way a word is sounded out and the way it is said. It is very important for the children to learn that irregular words can be sounded out -- that there is some similarity between the sounding out and the pronunciation. They must also learn to discriminate between the way the words sound when they are sounded out and the way we say them. (Distar, teacher's guide, page 40.)

Thus, children are instructed to sound out the word said as 'sss-ah-ih-ddd' and then to 'say the word' as 'sed.' Similarly, if children 'sound out' the word by saying 'sed,' the teacher is told to correct them: "You are saying the word. I told you to sound it out."

The point here, and I think it is an important one, is that the insistence on a simple consistent set of word recognition procedures may in the beginning lead to quick and efficient learning but may, if carried to extremes, lead to a kind of meaningless ritual which may end by confusing the child about the very relationships which we are trying to teach.

In contrast, the Open Court program confronts the child immediately with a more complex orthography. There is very little simplification of the alphabet. Upper and lower case letters are used and these are printed in a normal typeface. A few markings are used to indicate letter sounds. For example, microns mark the long vowel sound; a dot over the g indicates the soft sound; etc. But these are used in connection with certain mapping rules so that the markings occur only when the pronunciation is not otherwise signaled by one of these rules. (For example, the micron is used to signal the long o sound in go, but not in hope.) Furthermore, the multiple mappings and context-dependent rules are introduced from the beginning: for example, in the first lesson children learn two spellings for the long e sound (ē and ee) and in the second they add a third (ea).

These examples are probably sufficient to illustrate the

differences in these programs. I would like to consider now a few of the ways in which the simplified orthography and rules might affect the kind of reading that children learn to do.

Clearly there is an advantage in having a set of simple, consistent rules for children to follow: they are easy to practice and remember and conceivably easier to transfer to new situations. However, if one adopts the perceptual learning hypothesis described by Gibson & Levin (1975), then the effects of the altered orthography can be potentially detrimental. For the theory suggests that what the child actually learns about the printed text depends on the kinds of choices which he has to make and the context in which they occur. If a child is consistently instructed to ignore certain letters (e.g., the small size 'silent' letters in Distar), then he may acquire no information about those letters to store as part of his set of distinctive features or, if you like, recognition routines for a particular word. Further, if he is taught to process information in a left-to-right sequence, he may not acquire procedures for dealing with the many right-to-left dependencies which occur in regular English. In this connection, it would be interesting to find out what information such children actually take in about the so-called 'silent' letters in Distar and whether these children have difficulty making the transition to a regular orthography in their second year. (Similar questions were raised in connection with the use of i.t.a., but as far as I know, the issues were never fully resolved, e.g., Macdonald, 1970; Gillooly, 1971.)

But apart from potential difficulties which children may encounter in restructuring their word recognition routines, there is another and potentially more serious drawback to the use of altered orthographies. For to the extent that children are dependent on these systems, they may be unable to read materials in regular print. Superficially, this means that the child will have a limited set of opportunities to practice his skill (and, as we know, practice is very important in developing fluency). But even more important, this kind of restriction may affect the kind of concept which a child develops about the act of reading itself: who can do it, where it can get done, and for what purpose. For one thing, if the child is restricted to the material printed in his reader, he may get the idea that reading is essentially a school-based and teacher-dominated activity. Depending on his feelings about the school and his teacher, this may make reading seem more or less attractive, but it will certainly affect his notions of where it is and why it is that reading can be done. For example, he may find that he cannot use his reading to show off or act smart in front of parents or siblings or even strangers outside the classroom (e.g., by reading signs, store labels, headlines or even the printed matter on television). And as a result, reading may end up by being something of a closet skill -- quite useless to the child who wants to negotiate for himself an identity of 'being smart' in the outside world. The ramifications of such an attitude -- particularly when a child first encounters reading may be subtle but may end by having an important affect on

the uses to which his literacy is ultimately put.

I don't want to lay the whole problem of limited literacy on the use of altered orthographies -- clearly that would be absurd. But I do want to suggest that the use of such systems can contribute to the problem. And I do want to point out that it is precisely in a program for the disadvantaged that we find these materials.

The Open Court program, designed as it is for primarily middle class populations, uses a regular orthography, presumably because the assumption seems to be that most of its children can handle the complexities of the regular system without difficulty. As a result, reading is a potential activity in any environment and can be used to negotiate identities in a variety of circumstances.

The point that I wish to raise here is simply this: that in the search for an efficient instructional system, we may arrive at something which, at least superficially, seems to make life easier for the beginner but which in the end may hinder his subsequent development, either by teaching him inappropriate word recognition routines or, more importantly, by limiting his concept of what it is that he can use his literacy to accomplish.

Furthermore, I wish to make the obvious point that the limitations lie not just in his own expectations but in the expectations which any curriculum will generate in a teacher about what it is that children can learn. With its emphasis on simplistic rules and rote memory, a program such as Distar may convey the (no doubt unintended) impression that its children can't

absorb the "real thing" -- the kind of orthography, ad hoc diverse mapping rules and flexible heuristics -- which are used in programs intended for other children.

The Stories and Their Language

My next point has to do with the language in the stories that children read, both the vocabulary and the structure of the stories themselves.

I'll begin by noting that both programs have similar vocabularies, in terms of total number of words and number of high frequency words. Distar uses a total of 433 different words while Open Court uses 374. In terms of frequency, about 85% of the words in both programs fall in the highest frequency categories (A or AA words on the Thorndike & Lorge list, 1944).

Similarly, the children are reading stories of roughly equivalent length: by the end of the first year, for example, Distar stories are presented in two 90-word episodes while the Open Court stories run about 100 words each. The character of the stories is, however, rather different and it seems to me that these differences are very much related to the stated goals of the programs and, particularly, the purposes for which children are expected to engage in beginning reading. In Distar, the purposes center around the notion of decoding and the careful sounding out of new words: reading is variously defined as "blending," "sounding out," "training children to decode" and "teaching children to remember words in sentences." No other purposes are explicitly mentioned. In contrast, the stated goals of the Open Court program emphasize the notion of

beginning reading as a literary experience:

> Activities and exercises suggested in the Open Court program have two main goals: to place the child in contact with many of the important ideas and achievements of present and past times and to enlarge his capacity for effective self-expression. The stories and poems in the Readers acquaint him with the best in children's literature; they give him a bird's eye view of his cultural heritage, and they introduce him to significant ideas and concepts.... (teacher's guide, Open Court, page xiv).

The differences, it seems to me, reflect more than a superficial emphasis on skills vs. 'reading for meaning.' I think they are quite evident in the stories which children are asked to read.

As examples, we might consider one of the final stories presented in each program. In Figure Three, we can see the first episode from the Distar story. In reading it, we can see that the story structure is diffuse. For example, one would like to know why the hero is called a 'fat' man? How does his fatness relate to the story? And why did he go so fast in the first place? And more important, what finally made him slow down? And how does that relate to his wife? In fact, how did she get into the story in the first place?

Obviously, there are a lot of loose ends.

In contrast, the Open Court story has a much tighter construction (Figure Four). There is a recognizable conflict and resolution. The shepherd clearly outsmarts the wolf for reasons that are spelled out in the story; and indeed, the elements of the story seem to cohere in a logical way. We will return to a consideration of the structure of these texts in a moment.

But first, I want to look at the comprehension questions which follow each story. The comprehension questions for Distar are presented in Table One. As we can see, after each sentence or two, the teacher is told to ask a specific wh- type question about the content. The questions are apparently designed to give children practice locating and remembering specific information in the text which they have just read. Indeed, this is explicitly stated in the introductory part of the teacher's guide:

> Most of the (comprehension) questions will pose no particular difficulty for the children. If they do have trouble with the correct answer...repeat the sentence (from the story) and ask the question again. (The purpose of this part of the program is to enable them to) grow in their ability to remember the sequence of words in the sentence well enough to answer the simple comprehension questions that are posed. (Teacher's guide, Distar, page 56.)

In Open Court, there are few specific questions and virtually none which call for children to recall a specific word in the text. For example, in Table Two, we can read the questions which accompany the story about the shepherd and the wolf.

There seems to be no question that children can remember what they read let alone locate specific information in the text. Instead, the emphasis is on an integration of the meaning of the story as a whole, on discussion and on the opinions of individual children about what is a genuinely controversial issue.

Now there are three points that I would like to make about the stories and comprehension activities.

First, I would like to point out that the disadvantaged

child is given a simpler set of tasks to do: locating and remembering specific information from the immediately preceding text. In contrast, the goal for the middle class child is to integrate and reflect on material from the entire story.

The point here is not that disadvantaged children do not need practice with this particular set of skills -- probably all first graders do. The point is that the program seems to go no further. And this can be limiting in two ways: first, it can limit the child's expectations about what he can do with what he reads -- whether he will conceive of reflecting on it, having opinions about it, arguing with it, and so forth. But perhaps more important, the limited tasks can limit the teacher's expectations about the kinds of things that her children are capable of doing. And this may affect not only the reading curriculum, but also the kinds of questions which she will use in other parts of her program as well.

But apart from this, I would like to go back to another question which has to do with the way in which beginning reading is defined. In Open Court, the definition is essentially literary and, as we would expect, the program includes fables, folk tales, nursery rhymes and other poetry, aphorisms, proverbs and riddles. In Distar, on the other hand, beginning reading is defined as 'decoding' and the notion of literature is never discussed. Perhaps as a result, the reading materials contain no poetry and the prose is similar to the kind of thing which we have already read.

Now we can lament the lack of good writing in Distar and

we can even say that the Distar child (who is, after all, the disadvantaged child) is really denied access to a whole literary heritage.

It might be argued however, that the child will ultimately have access to everything once he gets through the beginning stages, but the first job is to help him break the code. And for such a task just about any text will do, provided only that it can be handled by the decoding rules.

There are two points which I would like to make about that, however. The first has to do with the relative complexity and difficulty of texts. We know from the work of Kintsch (1974), Frederiksen (1975), and many others that some texts are more difficult to remember than others and that memory is related to such things as the number of propositions and the way in which these are organized within a passage. Now as far as I know, this work has only been done with adults. But it is possible to speculate that the differences which affect recall and comprehension in adults will also affect these processes in beginning readers. If this is the case, then we may have good reason for preferring one kind of text over another. If we can show, for example, that the propositional structure of one text is more diffuse than another, we may have a basis for a preference.

But apart from complexity, there may be another reason for preferring the reading materials in Open Court. I am thinking now about their literary quality -- and the fact that they provide the beginner with an opportunity to read in a variety of

literary forms. My reasoning here is admittedly even more speculative, but I want to suggest that children must learn how to read in these forms in much the same way that they learn how to use various word recognition routines -- and that this kind of learning may require a lot of guided practice over a long period of time. In a sense, I want to suggest that literary forms (or more precisely, genres) can function as cognitive structures. And that they can serve as powerful devices for organizing experience -- in this case, the experience of verbal communication.

Scribner (in press) has presented impressive evidence for the effects of discourse on problem-solving and reasoning in oral language. She has also proposed a framework for describing how experience with a given genre can lead to the development of cognitive schema for organizing increasingly complex information within that genre.

In the case of written discourse, I want to suggest that such schema, once acquired, might serve to facilitate reading in a number of ways. For example, they might increase fluency by providing the child with a set of expectations to guide peripheral search and other preattentive processes. Or they might make it easier for him to form a context out of the particular elements which he is actively processing at any one time.

But in any case, it seems to me that learning to read must involve the learning of written discourse structures which might, as cognitive organizations, serve to order various aspects of the reading process. And if this hypothesis is even remotely correct, then it seems to me at least as important for

a program to provide extended practice with specific discourse forms as it is to provide practice with word recognition skills.

It is unclear whether such practice would be appropriate in the very beginning stages of reading. But it is possible to argue that the very repetitiveness and predictability of some forms may, in fact, aid the beginner even more than the child with more advanced recognition skills. (I am thinking now about certain rhyme structures in the Dr. Seuss books or the cumulative narrative structures found in stories like This is the House that Jack Built or The Gingerbread Man.)

Nor is it clear how one would arrange for such practice with beginning readers, particularly those who are able to read only a few words or phrases. Open Court solves the problem by providing extensive suggestions for poetry- and story-listening activities at the very beginning of the year. However, it may be that listening by itself will not be helpful in developing schema for the written mode. The most effective way for children to acquire structures of written discourse may be through some combination of listening and reading: thus, for example, an effective curriculum might include opportunities for children to listen to stories or poems while they are simultaneously looking at a printed version of the same text. (Such a procedure is, in fact, advocated in several beginning programs.) But in any case, if my hypothesis is correct, then failure to provide appropriate practice may serve in a very real way to limit the range and usefulness of the literacy which a child is supposed to be acquiring.

Now the purpose of this paper has not been to provide a comprehensive evaluation of these programs but to illustrate, with a few examples, certain basic differences in their concepts of literacy (i.e., the way in which each defines reading, the kinds of code relationships which children are expected to deal with, and the language that children are taught to read) and to point out that these differences do coincide with differences in the social class of the children for whom each program appears to be intended.

Now it can be argued that the differences are temporary: that the Distar children will ultimately transfer to a regular orthography and learn to read in all sorts of discourse structures later on. But even if this is the case, and it is a very optimistic case, I must also point out that the curriculum has its effect not just on the children, but also on the teacher, where it becomes part of her set of expectations and assumptions about what children can do: the relationships which they can perceive, the language which they can use, the questions which they can comprehend, and so forth. And it is possible that an emphasis on simple tasks and simplified relationships may not stop with reading but may affect the way in which she approaches a number of other curriculum areas as well.

The issue is a complex one: clearly children must acquire certain basic facts and skills about reading before they can develop enough literacy to use for any purpose. However, it is a basic contention of this paper that there may very well be different kinds of literacy, in the sense that different skills

may be required to read in different kinds of discourse structures and for different kinds of purposes (e.g., to answer different types of questions). In their cross-cultural studies of the cognitive effects of literacy, Scribner and Cole (1976) have presented intriguing evidence to support this notion: they found that there were specific relationships between the ways in which subjects used their literacy and their performance on classification, memory, and reasoning tasks. If this is true, then it is possible that the actual reading experiences provided by these programs may lead children to acquire somewhat different sets of basic facts and skills which, in the aggregate, amount to rather different kinds of literacies. The contention is not that one group of children will be illiterate but that each group of children may be literate in different ways.

Figure Legends

Fi ure One: The Distar Alphabet

Figure Two: "Silent" letters, Distar Program

Figure Three: First Episode, Distar Story

Figure Four: Open Court Story

Footnotes

1 The Foundation Program, level 1:1, published by Open Court Publishing Company, LaSalle, Illinois, fifth edition, 975.

2 Distar Reading 1, published by S.R.A., Chicago, Illinois, second edition, 1974.

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Table 1

Comprehension Questions, Distar Story[a]

After the children read:	You say:
A fat man liked to go fast.	What is this story about? (Signal.) A fat man liked to go fast.
He even talked fast.	Name some things that the fat man did fast. The children respond. He went fast in his car. He walked fast and ran fast. He even talked fast.
He sat down to get an egg and a cake and a pie.	What did he eat? (Signal.) An egg, a cake and a pie.
But he ate so fast that the egg slipped and fell on his feet.	What happened? (Signal.) He ate so fast that the egg slipped and fell on his feet.
The pie hit his wife.	Tell me all the things that happened when he went to eat the cake and the pie. The children respond. His nose went into the cake. He hit the pie. And the pie hit his wife.

a These are the comprehension questions for the Distar story (Story 159, Task 21, Distar 1). What the teacher says is in roman type; the children's responses are in italic.

Table 2

Comprehension Questions, Open Court Story[a]

Introducing the Problem of the Second Story: 'The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.'

A wolf made himself look like a sheep in order to fool the shepherd. Ask the children if they think the wolf will be able to fool the shepherd completely.

Reading the Story

If your class is ready for silent reading, let the children read each part of the story silently before they read it aloud. Then ask interpretive questions, or ask the children to predict what will happen next. However, if the silent-reading approach causes confusion and difficulty, go on with the unison reading.

Expressing Opinions

Ask the children how the shepherd could tell that the wolf was really a wolf. Ask them what the best way is to tell whether a person is really good or bad. (Can you depend upon what he says about himself and the way he looks, or should you think about the way he acts?)

---

a This material is quoted from page 316, Teacher's Guide.

Sounds in Order of Presentation with Day of Introduction

75

TASK 15 Children rhyme with sick

a. Touch the ball for sick. Sound it out.
b. Get ready. Touch s, i, c as the children say *ssslllc.*
If sounding out is not firm, repeat *b.*
c. What word? (Signal.) *Sick.* Yes, sick.
d. Quickly touch the ball for lick. This word rhymes with (pause) sick. Get ready. Touch l. *lll.* Move your finger quickly along the arrow. *Lllick.*
e. What word? (Signal.) *Lick.* Yes, lick.

TASK 16 Children read a word beginning with a stop sound (hāte)

a. Run your finger under āte. You're going to sound out this part.
Get ready. Touch ā, t as the children say *āāāt.*
b. Say it fast. (Signal.) *Ate.* Yes, this part says (pause) ate.
c. Repeat *a* and *b* until firm.
d. Touch the ball for hāte. This word rhymes with (pause āt.
Get ready. Move to h, then quickly along the arrow. *Hate.*
e. What word? (Signal.) *Hate.* Yes, hate.
f. Repeat *d* and *e* until firm.
g. Return to the ball. Now you're going to sound out (pause) hate.
Get ready. Quickly touch h, ā, t as the children say *hāāāt.*
h. What word? (Signal.) *Hate.* Yes, hate. Good reading. Do you hate monsters?
i. Repeat *g* and *h* until firm.

TASK 17 Individual test

Call on different children to do *g* and *h* in task 16.

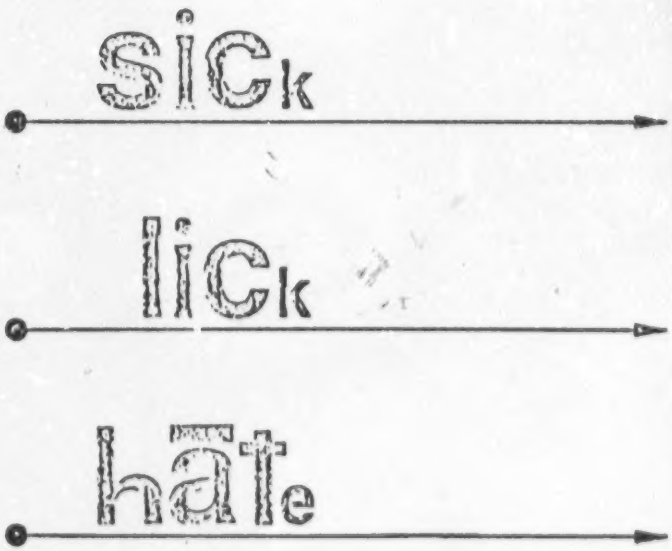
TASK 18 Children read the words the fast way

a. Now you get to read these words the fast way.
b. Touch the ball for lick. Get ready. (Pause three seconds.)
Move your finger quickly along the arrow. *Lick.*
c. Repeat *b* for the words sick and hāte.
d. Have the children sound out the words they had difficulty identifying.

TASK 19 Individual test

Call on different children to read one word the fast way.

Do not touch any small letters.



a fat man lIked to gō fast

a fat man lIked to gō fast. hē went fast in his car. hē walked fast and hē ran fast. hē ēven talked fast. his wIfe did not lIke him to gō sō fast. but hē went fast.

hē sat down to ēat an egg and a cāke and a pIe. but hē āte sō fast that the egg slipped and fell on his fēēt.

hē bent down fast and his nōse went into the cāke. hē went to wIpe his nōse fast and hē hit the pIe. the pIe hit his wIfe.

stop

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

A wolf wrapped himself in the skin of a sheep and got into a sheep pen. He ate a lamb, but at last the shepherd found him.

"Do not turn me away," said the wolf. "I am one of your sheep."

"No," said the shepherd. "You are only pretending to be a sheep. I know you are really a wolf."

"How do you know?" asked the wolf. "I look like a sheep."

"Yes," said the shepherd. "But you act like a wolf." He beat the wolf with a stick and drove him away.

OPEN DISCUSSION OF BARTLETT PRESENTATION

LESGOLD: First of all, I would like to reintroduce for this conference a comment that Isabel Beck made last time. She said that maybe the nicest thing would be for teachers to be trained on one of these curricula, and then be encouraged to use the other.

BARTLETT: Oh, wouldn't that be beautiful? At least we would get them thinking.

LESGOLD: Yes. I think, in fact, that that might be the only way to help teachers come to grips with what are really very analytical, but very important, components of teaching reading, which includes development of decoding skills and also of some sense of what verbal communication is all about.

The other point I would like to make is that although I didn't get a chance to look at it long enough, I believe that the Distar story has the same basic semantic macro-structure as the Open Court story. What it also has--which is perhaps a specific problem--is the occasional use of a few extra words, presumably to give children some practice on some words that had been introduced earlier, or on some symbol-sound correspondences that have been introduced earlier. But it is not the case, as far as I can tell, that either story failed to provide practice in the basic macro-structure of a narrative kind of story. They are both about the same.

The things that do differ, as you pointed out very well, are the uses that the teacher is asked to make of these stories and the potential the stories have for those kinds of uses. Again, I guess the problem is that there are two different and conflicting goals to teaching reading. The teacher who asks only

for expressive responses--"How can you tell whether a sheep is really a wolf"--is in fact asking for responses that do not demand reading of the story.

BARTLETT: They assume a reading of the story.

LESGOLD: That is one way of looking at it. The other way of looking at it is to assume that reading the story is probably not necessary. You can probably not easily distinguish the responses of the child who has read the story and had been asked "How can you tell? What are some ways in which you can tell whether a sheep is really a wolf?" from the responses of a child who hadn't read the story. I am not sure you could.

BARTLETT: You probably couldn't, but they are both aspects. One is diagnostic, and the other has to do with giving children the opportunity to use their pluracy. Of course you are absolutely right, you can't tell what a child has read unless you ask very specific questions.

MEYERS: I am not a publisher's representative. I want to make that absolutely clear; I have nothing to do with the publisher. I just want to go over a few comments that were made. First of all, Distar is not used entirely with disadvantaged children. There are about one million children in the United States today who are in these programs, and probably 65% or maybe 75% of those students are disadvantaged.

BARTLETT: But it was developed originally out of the Bereiter and Engelmann research.

MEYERS: Bereiter has not worked with Engelmann for over ten years. He is in Toronto.

I think one thing that is very difficult in this kind of analysis is to look at something like the orthography chart from the teacher's guide, or teacher presentation, that goes along with, for instance, the lesson 160, and after looking, make a concise statement about the vocabulary as it appears in the story. As Alan Lesgold mentioned a couple of minutes ago, the stories do depend upon the vocabulary that has been introduced, and the attempt is always to give the students a great deal of practice in the vocabulary that's been taught most recently. This is easy to see if you look at the reading vocabulary that goes along with each lesson.

In the area of comprehension, the goal, primarily, is initially to teach students that the questions they are to answer are answered by what they just read. We feel that this is a very, very important concept for children to master at a very early age. Until they have those skills, we feel that they can't go into interpretive responses of instances that are much less clear. There are also written comprehension questions that go along with the later stories that the students read. Those questions appear in student materials, which, by the way, are designed so that they can be taken home every day. So to say that the students get no opportunity to "show off" what they have learned and how they can read is also inaccurate. One of the attempts is to give the students something tangible that they have access to on a daily basis.

There is also a library series that's designed by lesson number to coordinate both with level 1 and level 2 reading, so children have additional reading material that is in the Distar orthography. Much of that material relates to variations of popular fables.

The third point that I would like to make is that we recommend, in the teacher's guide, that from about lesson 120 on--and there are 160 lessons in the first level program--the students start reading independently in other programs. We don't recommend specific publishers' programs, but we do recommend that children go into relatively highly structured programs, primarily linguistic programs, because we feel that the vocabulary in those programs is going to be at least somewhat consistent, and they will have a pretty clear shot at being able to decode those stories.

BARTLETT: I don't want to turn this into a debate, but I did want to make sure that you understood what I said. I have no quarrel with the fact that the WH questions are good for diagnostic purposes, and I agree that children may need help in locating information in the text or even in remembering information. That may be a real problem for six-year-olds. But the problem is that there is nothing more in the context of reading. Apart from what the kids may get into their heads about what they can do with what they read, the teacher has no opportunity to use integrative questions just at the point where the children are actually involved in reading. So the teacher may get it into her head that these kids didn't integrate verbal information at all. That's one point. I wanted to stress the fact, not that the questioning is bad, but that there's not enough; it's limiting in the way that I suggested.

Second, the things that the children take home from school are sort of interesting because they are school-based materials.

That leads to the third point, which has to do with the restricted orthography. I assume that the program uses the restricted, or altered, orthography, because children are unable to read in a regular orthography. If

they are able to read in a regular orthography, then why do you use these altered type faces in the instructional materials? The program seems to be quite inconsistent about that. On the one hand it tells the teacher that after lesson 130--about halfway through the year--children are ready to read regular readers.

MEYERS: It's almost three fourths of the way.

BARTLETT: Why does the program tell the teacher that the children are now able to read in regular readers and then continue with the altered orthography for almost a whole year?

MEYERS: First of all, it doesn't. The students are capable of reading in other material by the time they reach lesson 120. The assumption is that they are going to have less difficulty with relatively systematically designed programs, primarily those that are linguistic in nature. When they run into words that they haven't had, we simply tell them what the words are at that point. The program is continued this way, because, with about 40 lessons to go, there are still roughly ten sounds that haven't been taught. Those ten sounds are the least critical sounds of the entire 40-sound series; the most critical sounds are introduced first.

The last three or four sounds are <u>qu</u>, <u>u</u>, and a few others, that have a very low frequency in most reading material.

The Distar orthography is continued through the first 39 lessons in level 2, because those lessons are firm-up lessons. After a summer or more out of school, the kids need a review before they move on into anything that is really new.

The second block of level 2, which starts at lesson 40, is called the vowel mechanics block. In that block, we begin to teach the vowel conversion skills, where macrons begin to disappear. We do the vowels first; we teach the letter names of the vowels, and then we systematically fade the macrons and enlarge the e's at the end of regular words. By the end of the third block, which is called the faded orthography block, everything that made the orthography unique has been faded. By the end of level 2, the children have a significant number of lessons that are in traditional type face. The type face looks like the type face you find in any basal reader.

BECK: I heard you say, at the beginning of your paper, that Open Court and Distar were typical of beginning reading programs. I think that's a misconception. Open Court and Distar may be typical of phonic programs, but they are not nearly as widely used across the United States as basal programs, such as Holt and Ginn. Ginn 360 was used with over 15 million kids. Open Court and Distar are lesser used programs. If we are trying to get a picture of how beginning reading is taught in the United States, it is important to recognize that the practice across the country is probably accounted for to a much greater degree by the basals of Holt, MacMillan, and Ginn.

BARTLETT: You are certainly right about that.

BECK: Yes, the basals do provide a broader, more general picture of current practice.

BARTLETT: I think it would be interesting to emphasize the phonics program, in view of the fact that most of the research has been in terms of phonics. We even

have something of a flurry about all that.

BECK: I also have a question about "literary quality." As an "educated" adult, I used to know what was "good" and what wasn't, but now I'm confused. There are marvelous, marvelous high quality children's stories that I enjoy reading myself: Wind in the Willows, Winnie the Pooh, yet, I see children from many backgrounds get terribly turned on by books that librarians won't even allow in the library. Only now, after years of being a no-no, is the Bobsy Twins returning to a legitimate place in the library; yet, in the little newsstands, that kind of thing is being bought and read avidly. I know a number of "intellectuals" who got turned on to reading through the Rover Boys and through the Bobsy Twins, so I am not at all sure that the "nose in the cake" (that Elsa presented) isn't a hell of a good way to appeal to some kids, or maybe even many kids. I think we ought to be a little bit careful about adult judgment determining what children like to read.

BARTLETT: I couldn't agree with you more, and it amused me as I read it. I thought my little 4-year-old would dig that. But it was not just the content; it was the loose structure of the stories, the fact that it was meaningless. We all laughed, because there was so much that was meaningless in the story.

BECK: As adults we may be more used to the episodic structure of Western literature than children are, simply because we have been exposed to it in text for so many more years. I do think that the macro-structure of a text is extremely important for comprehension. Perhaps it should be made explicit in reading instruction, because you can follow a text more easily if you apprehend the macro-structure. I think the work of Kintsch, Rumelhart, and others will

help us look at the importance of macro-structures. But I wouldn't underestimate the extent to which much of our familiarity with the episodic structure--exposition, conflict, resolution--makes us anticipate the need for it in all texts that we see.

WHITE: Isabel, would you characterize the dominant reading curricula with a few jargony words such as whole-word, outside-in?

BECK: I think that the basal reader approach, with some modifications from the way it was described by Jeanne Chall in 1967, is still the primary approach to teaching reading in the United States. The major modification is that phonics is brought in earlier, but almost in a modular way. In other words, in the old Scott Foresman series--the early 1950's version, which I used when I first taught--Scott Foresman didn't start much phonics, in any real way, until about second grade, but we bought little supplementary commercial phonic workbooks for first grade. We taught a reading lesson, and then late in the afternoon, we taught a phonics lesson using the supplementary phonics workbook. Now the basal programs include the phonics sequence, but there is not a lot of "connective tissue" between the words in the stories and the phonic elements. That is why I say phonics is brought in in a modular way.

HOLLAND: Speaker requested that his comments be deleted.

BECK: Linda Meyers, some of the results that I have seen of gains of children in the Distar program have been quite astounding. Could you talk to us about that a little? I would be most interested in knowing what happens if you follow these kids through their years of schooling. I know you have significant results after

first grade and second grade. What happens later?

MEYERS: We have been part of the Federal Follow-Through program for the last eight years, and have had more sites than any other sponsor. We have worked with every type of child that can be described by any group that's interested in a child for any possibly reason, and our results are astounding.

The research for the ABT report was conducted by Stanford. The preliminary report which was released last month, compares a number of different sponsors and shows that, in terms of all of the early childhood approaches that were included in the Follow-Through project, the Engelmann-Becker Follow-Through model is the only one that has in any way achieved the goal that we said we were after when we started. That goal was to have our children at or above grade-level in reading, language, and arithmetic skills by the end of third grade.

We were working, of course, with children who are very, very hard to teach. They have been in reading, language, and arithmetic programs for three or four years.

We have also done longitudinal research, following those same children after fifth and sixth grade. We started doing that roughly two years ago, because that was the first time there were Follow-Through graduates in fifth and sixth grade. Our results show that those children have maintained the gains that they have made. One very interesting result of that research is the phenomenal success children have achieved in the area of science. We don't teach science as such; we don't have a science program, but the level 3 reading program is a very heavily science-based program. Level one's primary goal is decoding; its secondary goal is comprehension. In level 2, the primary goal is comprehension, and we do a great deal with serial stories, in which kids have to remember kind

of nonsensical rules from one story to the other, in order to solve the problems, answer the questions, and so on.

Our feeling is that until children can decode accurately and systematically, they will not be able to comprehend what they are reading. We see decoding as a phenomenal problem, because we are also working with a lot of poor readers now, children from grades 4 to 12 and adults from other programs. The basic problem all of those poor readers have is that they have no systematic way to decode words. So that is basically why we work as we do in level 1 and level 2. In level 3, however, our goal is to teach the children how to read for information.

If you look at research in schools in general, you see that what thrusts many children into remedial situations is the fact that as soon as they are handed social studies texts or science texts, for instance, they just fall apart. This is primarily because they have been in literature based programs. We don't have any complaint about that--I personally think it is wonderful--but the problem is that when kids are given something that they have to be able to read on their own, they have no facility for handling it. Our children do have that facility. When they get to the upper grades, their science scores, their social study scores, and so on are really outstanding, because they have the skills necessary for attacking that kind of material.

BECK: You are saying that in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, kids who used Distar are still doing well?

MEYERS: Extremely well, yes.

BECK: And the data are available?

MEYERS: Yes.

RESNICK: Does the Distar program continue through those grades? Doesn't it stop at third grade?

MEYERS: There are only three levels of reading, language, and arithmetic.

GORDON: To make the point that is being debated relevant to the issue, you ought to comment on something other than how well kids are doing in, say, an area like science, where one could argue that a lot of what has to be done has to do with picking up incidental information. I think that the comments between Bartlett and Holland had to do with reading appreciation; the extent to which one taps into the more creative aspects of reading.

As I listened to your comments, I felt that you were making a good case for the fact that the more technical skill mastery goals were holding up.

Would you care to comment on the extent to which, at the fifth, sixth, or seventh grade, you find youngsters who are enjoying reading, who are reading spontaneously, who are reading creatively, who are turned on to reading as a--how shall I call it--not exactly an art form? Have these children moved on to the utilitarian goals of reading?

MEYERS: For starters, I think that student attitudes and behaviors are really established much earlier than fifth or sixth grade. Our children, because they are taught systematically and have success every inch of the way, are very turned on to reading from the very beginning. The story books that they have in level 1 are usually well worn, because the children read the books over and over and over

again. The children are also very interested in reading other kinds of materials. This general attitude does continue all the way through school, and it shows up when they are in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade.

BARTLETT: The argument that I was trying to make is, essentially, that the interactions that children engage in will effectively structure the kind of intellectual work that they do later. The Distar program, at least at the first level, tends to be teacher-dominated. It tends to be a program in which the teacher asks lots of WH questions, lots of questions that require children to locate specific informaion in a specific visual display. But there are no opportunities for the children to initiate any interaction with the material or reorganize anything in the material. In fact, there is no place, even in the instructional interactions, for the child's own language or opinions about anything. Everything is based on the text in front of them or on something that the teacher has in her head, some standard she has. The child may or may not know what the teacher has in mind; that is neither right nor wrong.

The hypothesis I want to propose, in doing this analysis, is that unless you can practice a certain kind of intellectual work, you are not going to be very good at doing that work.

I would want to see what kinds of lessons there are in the second- and third-grade parts of this program to see whether this hypothesis holds up. On the basis of only the first-grade materials, if my hypothesis is correct, kids have to be getting that practice somewhere else, because it's not provided in the program.

MEYERS: There are two responses to that. First, in level 1 we feel that the

priority is to teach kids that the questions that are being asked can be answered by what they read. In most programs--Open Court being relatively typical in this way, as many people have commented--it isn't necessary actually to have read that information to be able to respond to the question the teacher asks. We feel that students need to know, initially, that they can indeed answer questions from what they read, and the only way to make the children realize that is to teach them to respond to basic questions: who, what, where, when, [illegible] how, and so on. Once they have learned these skills, they move to level 2, where there is a much greater emphasis on questions that require interpretation of what has been read. Level 2 emphasizes integration of the information from different passages that have been read, ability to summarize stories, and so on. By the time kids get to level 3, the kinds of workbook items that they do are deductive items, generalization items, where, after gathering information from innumerable stories that they have read, they are called upon to examine very different examples and to come up with explanations. There is really no attempt to structure any kind of verbatim response to the questions that are dealt with.

I think that it's very difficult, in the case of Distar, probably much more so than with most porgrams, to look at level 1 and draw conclusions about what the system's goals are, because we recommend that any child who begins level 1 stay in at least through level 2, and, ideally, through level 3. This gives them the opportunity not only to learn to decode accurately, comprehend well what they have read, and draw conclusions from it, but also to learn how to work from information that's presented in story context.

BARTLETT: I am glad to hear that the instructional interactions change in the program; that is good news. The hypothesis, though, I would like to leave on the table anyway.

JACKSON: I would just like to say that there is never going to be a reading program or reading system that's going to do everything for any group of youngsters, whether they are middle-class or lower-class or whatever. What needs to be emphasized is a balanced reading program, one involving an instructional decoding system that is diagnostic, sequenced and that has reinforcement strategies. You are never going to find an instructional system, as they are calling such things now, or a piece of instructional material that is going to do all things for all children, for all times.

(1) I think that Open Court does well in integrating communications skills.

(2) I worked with the first project that was set up in the Open Court, and those kids did fantastic with the project that was set up.

(3) I worked with the first project that was set up on the Distar in Chicago, and the kids did fantastic in terms of the decoding.

I think that from our results in the first-grade studies--the Harvard-Carnegie studies and so on--we should be past the point of looking at a reading program as the solution to the problems of all children.

BARTLETT: I couldn't agree more, and I would like to say that one of the things that was really neat to see in the NIE request for proposals for their new projects was a whole section on what amounts to an ethnography of teaching. I think that when we get good ethnographies of the reading instruction situation, maybe we will be well on our way to understanding.

F. SMITH: You said in the beginning of your presentation that you were going to get into something political.

BARTLETT: I think the whole point was to show that even when you get down to curriculum, to the kinds of stories that are chosen, and to the kinds of things that are in teacher's guides, in a sense, you are dealing with politics. You are dealing with the uses of literacy that may very well be assigned by society to different groups in that society.

F. SMITH: If that's the case, would you say that all of the discussion after your presentation has missed the point of what you were trying to say?

BARTLETT: I don't know. That depends on what anybody else thinks.

F. SMITH: You know what you were trying to say. You wanted to make a political point. Have the discussions, in fact, been to the point that you were trying to make?

BARTLETT: I don't know. I think it's all politics. In a sense, I think it is all part of the same problem, and we have got to get through all of this other stuff first.

JACKSON: I think Frank is making a valid point, Elsa. I think you did start to say something, and I don't know whether you backed off of it or what. I think that one of the things that you are saying is very, very important; that is, what we teach and how we teach youngsters can expand or limit them. If we start by declaring and thinking that a group of youngsters are limited and, therefore, can only take this much, and because of it, this is all we can give those kids, then we are, in fact, inhibiting their learning process and environment. The types of questions that you use with youngsters determine the type of

comprehension that you build generally. If you are only using--and I am not saying that this is what Distar does--literal questions, you are only developing literal comprehension skills. I think that is a valid point, and I hope you are not backing out.

BARTLETT: No, I am not at all. I think that all of this is part of something that is very big. What we really ought to be talking about are precisely these very minute and very small things.

BLOCK: Elsa, this is just a technical point about program analysis. It is a problem we encountered when we did ours: How do you decide to get a representative sample of the material so that you can draw some of these conclusions? We all like to say some things about the general characteristics of a particular program, but what bothered me was deciding how much to look at, how extensively, at what levels, and so forth. How did you resolve that?

BARTLETT: Well, there was a whole portion in this paper that I never talked about at all. It had to do, in a more general way, with the instructional interactions. I counted the different kinds of questions that were used. And actually I took the whole thing, because I had no particular hypothesis. Well, no, I back off of that. I started to count everything, but it got to be too much for the short period of time that I had. So I counted, I guess, every other lesson, but I sampled all the way through. I did that to determine what kinds of questions were used--whether they were WH questions or open-ended questions--and I found them totally different.

BLOCK: I was just worried about representativeness.

MEYERS: One very critical issue wasn't brought up in the discussion at all: How you go about implementing a program after it's developed. When we first began--Carl Bereiter was around then--our initial attempt was just to develop teaching strategies as such. Then we realized very quickly that it was very short-sighted just to try to teach teachers strategies and then give them programs that give them no assistance in how to implement what they had been taught. What we then went to was publication. Quite honestly, we considered the publication of these programs real compromises in terms of our ultimate goals, which are to train people in teaching strategies that enable them to present concepts, so the children would acquire those concepts. We wanted to train the teachers in ways to correct as soon as the children make a mistake. We wanted to try to provide sequences of instruction for any child who has any difficulty with any kind of skill. We wanted to train teachers to do things that enable that child to master the skills. Also, it's always very, very difficult to look at the Distar program without knowing the kind of training that teachers go through when they are taught how to use the program. The training is really very, very important. The structure of the teacher's guide is much different from that of most teacher's guides. We try to show the teacher how to teach whatever she is teaching at a particular point. The guide is broken into pre-reading and reading skills. In level 1, for instance, lessons 1 through 36 are for developing pre-reading skills; lessons 37 through 160, for reading skills. The guide covers the critical behaviors that the teacher needs to exhibit to teach a particular skill, and the common teaching errors. Very often this is just a reiteration of the critical teaching skills, but the errors are the ones that we know teachers are going to make in presenting those skills.

BARTLETT: That is a big plus; those kinds of considerations are terribly

important.

MEYERS: What you did mention is how to evaluate the children's performance, which is an incredibly important issue. Because of evaluation guidelines, the teacher knows what the children are supposed to be able to do along the way.

BARTLETT: The fact that the program at least attempts to provide such guidelines is an enormous step in the right direction. But to repeat, it differentiates, between the difficulties the child might have with the phonics skills, and with the context in which the instruction takes place.

GORDON: It seems to me, also, that the problem you are presenting is related to a problem that came up at the first of the meetings we had. It has to do with the relationship of skill mastery to the ultimate development of competence. I think you are quite correct in calling our attention to some political implications of the problem, but I have a feeling that if we look too sharply at the political implications, without seeing some of the scientific underpinnings, we'll make a mistake. When some people argue that we cheat low status persons by focusing too sharply on the mechanics of certain kinds of skill mastery, I resonate to that argument, particularly if it seems that we are short-changing that segment of the population with respect to some of the other kinds of interventions that may enrich their lives. At the same time, I have to go back and ask, "What are the essential underpinnings for the development of competence?" If the answer is the almost rote mastery of certain skills, then I can't reject that because it seems to me to be less than what you give privileged people, if there is equal attention to the addition of these extra things, once that has been done.

BARTLETT: That's the point.

GORDON: In your paper, Elsa, you looked at the Distar materials out of context. Because you simply looked at what the manual says at a particular level, you may have missed the program's attention to other skills. If you want your argument to be taken as a basis for either prescribing a particular program or rejecting the heavy emphasis on skill mastery, you may be making as serious a mistake as we make when we go in the other direction. I would not see it so much as a political issue as I would see it as a more fundamental question: What is the relationship of skill mastery to the ultimate development of competence? The political point you want to make gains its importance in the resolution of that issue.

BARTLETT: Absolutely. I just couldn't agree more.

CHOMSKY: There seems to be something everybody is leaving out. Elsa has said that we limit the opportunities that lower-class children are going to have by keeping the programs limiting in themselves. Linda Meyers is saying, "Oh, no, the program is marvelous; it liberates; it creates educated children, who are going to appreciate literature." My question is: Even if Linda Meyers is absolutely correct, and the program is marvelous, and the kids are totally educated, what happens to the opportunities that are, therefore, open to them? By creating this marvelous, educated group of lower-class kids, we haven't eradicated the lower-class. What is the consequence in terms of the unfair structure of society that Elsa is complaining about? Even if what you say is ten times as true as you say it is, and even if you have achieved that limited goal, you haven't really changed the basis of the original complaint: that the

structures are unfair to begin with.

RESNICK: That could be counted as a most enormous success. If primary education can be so excellent that it wipes out skill differences, or competence differences, between children, then society can no longer ignore the structural differences that it has, in other domains, between social classes.

CHOMSKY: I doubt very much that that is going to happen, but even given that it does, where are you when you have finished? If you achieve your goal, but nobody follows through with the next step, where are you?

GORDON: A lot of people are arguing that if one's competence is improved, one's ability to challenge the system is improved; one's ability to cope with the system is improved. So I wouldn't make reading programs responsibile for changing the system.

MEYERS: Our basic premise is that if a child can find his way into the classroom, we can teach that child to read. Our second premise is--and we believe this very strongly--we don't pretend to know all of the variables that are going to enable people to do what the want in life, but we know that without basic skills, alternatives are extremely limited. With basic skills, any individual does at least have the opportunity of choice in terms of establishing personal goals and going on to do what he or she wants to do. Ultimately, our goal is to help people reach <u>their</u> goals. We are preventive educators. We don't want to wait until these kids are in fourth and fifth grade, and then have to launch into a very complex remedial system to try to get them up to where they can succeed.

In the district in which our Follow-Through site in New York exists, for example, over 85% of the kids and I am talking about over 30 elementary schools in Bedford-Styvesant, Ocean Hills, Brownsville, and Brooklyn--are reading more than two years below level. How many choices do they have? Their choices have to be limited much more than those of a child who has attained basic skills.

END SESSION